

*Future Proposals*

On trade, we propose to continue to resist protectionist bills aimed at limiting key Italian exports and emphasize the availability of remedies other than trade restrictions. We will continue to cooperate in the monetary field.

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**196. Telegram From the Embassy in Italy to the Department of State<sup>1</sup>**

Rome, August 7, 1970, 1205Z.

4247. Sub: Planning for possible coup attempt week of 10 August. Pass White House.

1. Talk of the necessity for a coup to alleviate the seeming inability to form and maintain a stable government has been endemic in Italy since the war, waxing and waning as governmental crises mount and then subside.

2. The prolonged series of crisis over the past year coupled with the rising level of labor unrest has predictably brought the question to the fore again. I would be inclined to dismiss it again as this Mission has correctly concluded many times before were it not for additional factors which seem to me to make such a threat more credible now than before. The PCI seems to share this estimate since on May 25, when another such rumor was afloat, not a single top Italian Communist slept in his own bed that night.

3. Traditionally, such planning has not involved either the "political class" or the Italian military. We have increasing evidence that this is no longer true. On Wednesday, while he was still Prime Minister,<sup>2</sup> Rumor in conveying to me his current disenchantment with Piccoli, said Piccoli has started playing with the generals, (which we have inde-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 695, Country Files—Europe, Italy, Vol. II. Secret; Nodis.

<sup>2</sup> Rumor resigned on July 6 after the Socialist and Communist Parties agreed to collaborate in formation of a majority for the regional government of Tuscany. On July 11, President Saragat asked Giulio Andreotti to form a government. When Andreotti could not create a majority coalition, the President, on July 25, asked Emilio Colombo to form a government. Colombo announced agreement on a four-party ministry on August 4. Saragat swore in the Colombo government on August 6; it lasted for 527 days until January 15, 1972. Saragat had asked Rumor to stay in office until a new government could be formed; Wednesday was August 5.

pendently confirmed). Rumor added that now that Piccoli was Minister of State Participation, overseeing IRI, ENI, etc., he had access to unlimited money.

4. General Miceli, Italian Chief of Army Intelligence, has recently made unusual effort to cultivate Col. Clavio, ARMA, and has passed on to Clavio three letters sent to various military commands in Rome purporting to alert these commands to a coup attempt in the second week of August.

5. General Miceli has provided Col. Clavio with a tape recording<sup>3</sup> of a monologue by an unidentified Italian (probably a politician) who was making remarks to a person or persons unknown. The tape is a difficult one to understand and ended with vague talk about something having to be done in Italy either before or during Ferragosto. The context of the remarks was such as to leave the impression that a military coup was contemplated. Efforts by Clavio to have Miceli identify the speaker have not succeeded since Miceli claims he was given the tape by [*less than 1 line not declassified*] a close supporter of Antonio Cariglia of the PSU and that he, Miceli, does not know who was speaking.

6. On August 4 Miceli told Clavio that in attempting investigate what behind the letters referred to in par. 4 above, he had run into another group, not connected with the supposed author of the letters, who have been known in the past to be coup minded; [*less than 1 line not declassified*]

7. General Miceli has repeatedly emphasized both to ARMA [*less than 1 line not declassified*] that both he and General Marchesi, Chief of Staff of Ministry of Defense, have close and intimate relations with and full support of principal corps commanders. Miceli is General Marchesi's candidate to succeed Admiral Henke as Chief of SID. General Marchesi has just returned from a visit to the north. This is not unusual but the coincidence cannot be ignored.

8. All of the above is circumstantial and nebulous, yet it conveys a mood which is pervasive and consistent. This week a prominent American businessman reported to me that he had been approached by an Italian acquaintance who informed him of a coup planned for the first half of August which would be supported by all elements of the armed services, Confindustria and the Carabinieri. The police were not involved as they were too "infiltrated" by the Communists. The American businessman was asked to ascertain whether the US would recognize such a regime if it came to power and whether he would see another member of the group for more details. I asked him to do so [*3½ lines not declassified*] He was told that:

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<sup>3</sup> No documentation relating to this recording was found.

- (1) The organization involved is called Fronte Nazionale.
  - (2) The head of the organization is Valerio Junio Borghese.
  - (3) It is made up primarily of retired military personnel allegedly with broadly based contacts throughout Italian society (industrialists, labor unions and active military personnel), is not tied to any political party, is not monarchist in bent and has a para-military substructure.
  - (4) Its motivation is nationalistic, anti-Communist and pro-American.
  - (5) It has been meeting and organizing throughout Italy with the intent of having a coup d'état which will be assisted by the armed forces but once installed the military would be subordinated to civilian authority. Its state of readiness is such that it can be activated in six hours. Ten to fifteen days from now was estimated for effecting the coup.
  - (6) [2 lines not declassified]
  - (7) They desire the U.S. Government to be informed and to recognize the group once they are installed in power. They ask no specific help and only request that their plans be kept secret and they not be exposed.
  - (8) The Italian alleged that a situation report and action program was passed to General accompanying President Nixon to Rome (presumably General Walters) but no reaction was forthcoming.
  - (9) It was said specifically that operations would be mounted with or without US support.
9. The record and activities of Valerio Junio Borghese are, of course, well known to us. Prince Borghese visited Embassy on January 26th this year (memcon in Dept.).<sup>4</sup> One is inclined not to take this current spate of rumors too seriously. Yet it would be a grave mistake not to recognize that a judgment regarding the mood of exasperation mixed with a fear of the future could now cause a coalescence of military support around his movement which might tempt them to try such a coup. And the normal disarray of the "Ferragosto" holidays would be an appropriate time.
10. I do not believe there is the slightest immediate danger of a Communist takeover in Italy. While I think Colombo's government is probably the last chance for the center-left experiment, I think there is much better than an even chance that a movement back toward the center can be worked out within the democratic process. I consider it highly unlikely that a coup attempt such as that apparently being contemplated could succeed. If attempted and unsuccessful, it would

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<sup>4</sup> No copy of this memorandum of conversation was found.

probably cause a massive leftward move in the political spectrum. If attempted, and successful, such a government could not be maintained without violent opposition and consequent necessity for massive oppression. Either outcome would seriously weaken Alliance structure, would likely entail unpredictable repercussions on Mediterranean balance and our Mid-East initiatives, and would likely jeopardize outcome of SALT talks. Current domestic difficulties over matter of Spanish and Greek regimes would also be magnified.

11. I am therefore conveying to Prince Borghese the message that we do not believe recourse to such measures are appropriate in present circumstances, and that our estimate is that, if attempted, they will not succeed. Therefore, he might be wise to emulate his collateral relative, Napoleon, and choose as his current code word the phrase "not tonight, Josephine".<sup>5</sup>

**Martin**

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<sup>5</sup> Martin reported on a second meeting between the U.S. businessman and his contact and of discussions between U.S. and Italian officials on the purported coup in telegram 4318 from Rome, August 10. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 695, Country Files—Europe, Italy, Vol. II) Telegram 128738 to Rome, August 10, transmitted Secretary Rogers's approval of Martin's suggestion for a message to Borghese. (Ibid.) In telegram 4342 from Rome, August 11, Martin commented that he had given considerable thought to directly informing Saragat and Colombo of coup plans but finally decided to notify the Italian Government through normal channels. (Ibid.) In telegram 4654 from Rome, August 26, Martin reported that despite "negative U.S. reaction," the Embassy's contact within the coup plotters' group had again approached U.S. officials to report he would seek "proper guidance from Americans" after a successful coup. Martin discounted the likelihood of a coup attempt and reported that he had passed the latest information to Italian intelligence. (Ibid.)